

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 312 665

CS 212 158

AUTHOR Budnik, Patricia McNulty
TITLE Improving Spelling and Language Arts Skills of
Chapter 1 Fourth Grade Students through Paragraph
Compositions.
PUB DATE 89
NOTE 82p.; Ed.D. Practicum, Nova University.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Dissertations/Theses -
Practicum Papers (043)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Grade 4; Intermediate Grades; *Paragraph
Composition; Practicums; Writing Exercises; *Writing
Improvement; Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS Education Consolidation Improvement Act Chapter 1;
Writing Development; Writing to Read

ABSTRACT

This practicum addressed the problem of Chapter 1 fourth grade students not being able to compose a paragraph using correct spelling and language arts skills. The subjects were 16 predominantly Black and Hispanic students in a school in an old small southern city. The students had paragraph composition assignments weekly. The goals were: (1) to increase the use of correctly spelled words; (2) to improve the number of correct responses in punctuation and the use of a main idea followed by detail sentences; (3) to compose grammatically correct sentences using paragraphs with indentation; and (4) to improve self images as writers. Results indicated that writing paragraphs did improve the acquisition of correct spelling and language arts skills. The students' enjoyment of having their paragraphs read to the class was the most rewarding result. Students advanced in spelling to fourth grade level, one to two years above expected reading level. The majority improved their spelling performance, increased the number of words spelled correctly on the sentence dictation test, increased the number of words used in their compositions, identified the main idea of a paragraph, placed four detail sentences in proper sequence, and increased the number of grammatically correct sentences. All students improved their self images as writers. (Eight tables of data are included; nine appendixes including prewriting and postwriting surveys, lists of spelling words, and paragraph samples are attached.) (Author/KEH)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ED312665

OCT 17 1989

Improving Spelling and Language Arts Skills
of Chapter 1 Fourth Grade Students
Through Paragraph Compositions

by

Patricia McNulty Budnik

Cluster XXV

A Practicum I Report Presented to the Ed.D. Program
in Early and Middle Childhood
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

NOVA UNIVERSITY

1989

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Patricia M. Budnick

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

- ☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- ☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CS212158

PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

Deborah H. Martinez (signature)
Deborah H. Martinez

Fourth Grade Teacher
Title

Cooper City, Florida
Address

September 10, 1989
Date

This practicum report was submitted by Patricia M. Budnik under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova University.

Approved:

September 10, 1989
Date of Final Approval of
Report

Polly Peterson, Ph.D. (signature)
Polly Peterson, Ph.D., Adviser

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to Dr. Polly Peterson, my practicum advisor, for her invaluable assistance and her expertise. A debt of gratitude is also owed to Dr. Jeri Sorosky, my cluster coordinator, for the many kindnesses she has shown to myself and my family. The students' enthusiasm for this project made its success possible and for that I am grateful.

My greatest appreciation goes to Mabel E. McNulty, my mother, for learning how to use a computer at the age of 76 and processing my entire report.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENT.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
LIST OF TABLES	vi
ABSTRACT	vii
 Chapter	
I INTRODUCTION	1
Description of Community.....	1
Author's Work Setting and Role.....	2
II STUDY OF THE PROBLEM	6
Problem Description	6
Problem Documentation	7
Causative Analysis	9
The Related Literature	12
III ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS	17
Statement of General Goals	17
Behavioral Expectations	17
Evaluation Instruments	19
IV SOLUTION STRATEGY	21
Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions	21
Description of Selected Solutions...	27
Report of Action Taken	30
V RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	33
Results	33
Conclusions.....	46
Recommendations	51
Dissemination	52

REFERENCES	53
------------------	----

Appendices

A	STUDENT'S PREWRITING SURVEY	55
B	STUDENT'S POSTWRITING SURVEY	57
C	RESULTS OF STUDENTS' PREWRITING SURVEYS	59
D	RESULTS OF STUDENTS' POSTWRITING SURVEYS	61
E	COMPARISON OF PREWRITING AND POSTWRITING SURVEYS	63
F	LISTS OF SPELLING WORDS	65
G	SENTENCE DICTATION TESTS FOR SPELLING AND PUNCTUATION	70
H	MAIN IDEA FOLLOWED BY FOUR DETAIL SENTENCES IN ORDER TEST	72
I	PARAGRAPH SAMPLES	74

List of Tables

Table

1	Spelling Tests Results	34
2	Words Spelled Correctly on Sentence Dictation Tests	36
3	Punctuation Used Correctly on sentence Dictation	38
4	Average Number of Words Used to compose a Paragraph: First Six Weeks Compared to Last Six Weeks	39
5	Indentation Used in Writing Paragraphs	41
6	Main Idea of Paragraph Plus Four Detail Sentences	42
7	Percent of Grammatically Correct Sentences in Unedited Paragraphs	44
8	Percent of Grammatically Correct Sentences in Unedited Paragraphs: First Six Weeks Compared to Last Six Weeks	45

ABSTRACT

Improving Spelling and Language Arts Skills of Chapter 1 Fourth Grade Students Through Paragraph Compositions.
Budnik, Patricia M., 1989: Practicum Report, Nova University Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood.
Descriptors: Elementary Education / Elementary Schools / Intermediate Grades / Grade 4 / Chapter 1 / Spelling / Language Arts / Writing / Composition

This practicum addressed the problem of Chapter 1 fourth grade students not being able to compose a paragraph using correct spelling and language arts skills. The lack of these skills is one of the reasons students have fallen behind grade level by one or two years. The literature indicates that the acquisition of written language skills is best learned through writing in context rather than learning the components in isolation.

The writer's goals were: (a) to increase the use of correctly spelled words, (b) to improve the number of correct responses in punctuation and the use of a main idea followed by detail sentences, (c) to compose grammatically correct sentences using paragraphs with indentation and (4) to improve the students' self images as writers. In addressing these goals, the writer implemented an assignment of composing paragraphs weekly using some spelling list words. This also included a contest with prizes for the winner and runners-up.

The majority of the students who participated in the assignment met six of the practicum's eight objectives. Results indicated that writing paragraphs does improve the acquisition of correct spelling and language arts skills. The students' enjoyment of having their paragraphs read to the class was the most rewarding result. The students advanced in spelling to fourth grade level, one to two years above their reading level. The majority of them improved their spelling performance, increased their number of words spelled correctly on the sentence dictation test, increased the number of words used in their compositions, identified the main idea of a paragraph, placed four detail sentences in proper sequence, and increased the number of their grammatically correct sentences. All of the students improved their self images as writers.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Community

The elementary school in which this practicum was conducted was located in a low to middle socio-economic area of a predominantly Hispanic and Black neighborhood. The project of one-story single family homes and the two-story school facility were 15 years old. The community was a newer part of an old small city in the southern United States. It was bordered by lakes, canals, farmland, and cattle ranches. Its growth was initiated by a large influx of Spanish-speaking refugees and in its beginning its 99% Hispanic make-up was reflected in the school. The community and school population had stabilized to approximately half Hispanic and half Black in recent years.

An economic recession in the late 1970's devastated the area. Many homes were abandoned, boarded up, and taken back by the Federal Housing Authority. The school enrollment dropped from over a 1000 to 800 students or less. Today there is little evidence of past hard times. The tourist hotels which were a major employer for community members had also been through changes that had reestablished them into a more stable economy. Some clothing manufacturing plants had branched out into cottage industry and employed many of the mothers in their homes as piecemeal workers. There were few

resources in the immediate neighborhood other than a small shopping center. Bus and private transportation were vital to the area for employment, education, shopping, and recreational opportunities.

Author's Work Setting and Role

The elementary school in which this practicum was conducted was designed as an open pod concept with no walls separating the classrooms. It was air conditioned and carpeted as an attempt at noise reduction. The school's ethnic population consisted of 45.7% Hispanic, 41.6% Black, 11.4% Caucasian, and 1.13% Asian/American Indian with a total of 790 students from kindergarten to fifth grade. There was a federally funded Headstart program for three classes of 2 to 4-year-olds that were not counted in the published statistics.

Eligibility of the school for participation in the federally funded Chapter 1 program was determined by the percentage of students on free and/or reduced lunch. If the percentage was higher than the district-wide average then the eligible schools were chosen in economic rank order. This school had 63.97% of its children coming from low income families and therefore met the criteria. The program was an all day basic skills class with a pupil-teacher ratio of 14:1 in first through third grades and 16:1 in fourth grade. The students were placed in the class by their Stanford Achievement Test scores. If they were in the 30th percentile

or below in reading comprehension and the 49th percentile or below in mathematics application, then they were placed in a Chapter 1 class.

The school was a part of the state's public education system and also one of the largest school districts in the United States. The average cost per FTE (Full Time Equivalent) pupil was \$2452.28. For the exceptional student the average cost was \$8240.90. Many services were provided such as an E.S.O.L. class, English for Speakers of Other Languages, for the 15.7% of students with limited English proficiency, two exceptional education teachers for the 3% of students with emotional and/or learning disabilities, a media specialist with a library of over 5000 books, a counselor, a music teacher, an art teacher, 1.5 physical education teachers, three bilingual teachers, and four aides. There was an after school care program run by the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) for a small weekly fee which provided study periods, games, rest, and snacks for the approximately 45 children enrolled.

Staff members included one principal, one assistant principal, 20 regular classroom teachers, 10 Chapter 1 teachers, and one Chapter 1 facilitator. The school shared a visiting teacher, a speech/hearing specialist, and a school psychologist with two other schools. The instructional staff, numbered at approximately 45, was committed by their school philosophy to provide the students with opportunities for intellectual growth, to become physically fit, to develop

a positive self-concept and a good set of values, to practice good health habits, and to the education of the total child. Extra-curricular activities were provided such as academic enrichment, the school newspaper, student government under the supervision of school personnel, and placement testing of gifted students, academic or artistic, into a nearby center.

The writer's educational background included 12 years in a northeastern public school system, a bachelor's degree in education, a master's degree in elementary administration and supervision, and a specialist's equivalency in elementary education. The writer had served the local school system as a classroom teacher for 22 years, 15 years in her present school. During this time she had taught all levels from kindergarten to sixth grade.

Positions held by the writer had been team leader in fourth and sixth grades, reading systems facilitator, reading teacher for the former Title 1 after school program, supervising teacher for two interns, chairperson of the test committee, the social committee, the quality instructional incentive program, and a teacher in the adult education community school. She represented her faculty as union steward for the past nine years and was an after-school reading tutor for three years. She won a mini-grant for two years from the Foundation for Excellence in Education.

During the practicum, the writer's role was that of union steward, and a Chapter 1 teacher of a fourth grade class of 16 students. The class was situated in an open

learning center with four other fourth grade classes. She had full responsibility for the teaching and management of a balanced curriculum which was designed to meet all objectives for a fourth grade basic skills class. Most of the day was devoted to individualized reading, language arts, and mathematics instruction using a diagnostic/prescriptive approach. The remainder of the day included art, music, Spanish, physical education, oral language development, and language experience activities.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

The writer's fourth grade Chapter 1 students ranged from one to two years below grade level in reading, writing, and sometimes math. They were particularly deficient in their language arts skills. Although none of these children had been identified as learning disabled or having any other exceptionality which might hinder them, their progress had been impeded or delayed to the extent that some faced retention.

Many of these students had discipline problems, short attention spans, negative self-images, irregular school attendance, and poor peer relationships. The student body was almost equally divided into a Black and a Spanish population. It was a bicultural, biracial school. Although the Spanish students were bilingual, their English vocabularies were limited which compounded the problem of proficiency in the language arts. It was the writer's belief that there was a lack of adequate experiential background to enhance language acquisition that was common to both student populations.

Report card grades were assigned to the subjects of reading, composition (English), handwriting, spelling, math

computation, math application, science, music, art, physical education, and Spanish if elected. If the student was two years below grade level the grade was satisfactory remedial or unsatisfactory remedial. The majority of the letter grades received during a school year was a C meaning average progress. Since the report card designated separate grades for the language arts subjects, it followed that many were taught in isolation in order to establish a basis for the grades. The teachers were held accountable for placing those grades on the report card.

Spelling lists were taught without using them to any extent in writing exercises. The English book presented exercises to practice the various components of the language in multiple choice or fill in type of testing. Handwriting was predominantly a letter by letter exercise with words or sentences to a much lessor degree. The students were rarely asked to combine those subjects into a meaningful writing, reading exercise. The students could not write a paragraph using correct spelling, punctuation, spacing, composition, English, handwriting, and format which consists of a main idea followed by at least four detail sentences, or proper indentation. In conclusion the problem statement that was addressed in this practicum was that the students could not write a paragraph using proper language arts skills.

Problem Documentation

The following information documented that the problem

was real. The Stanford Achievement Test identified the students who were in the Chapter 1 classes by their scores. Those who scored below the 30th percentile in reading comprehension and below the 49th percentile in math application were automatically designated into the Chapter 1 class. A letter was sent home explaining this to the parents on the child's first day at school. Parents had the option of requesting that their child be excluded from the class if they so desired. Occasionally parents do not want their child labeled as being in the "slow" class.

The Ginn Reading Placement Tests gave the students' reading levels. They were used school-wide. This fourth grade had 11 students reading at a second grade level, second half and five students reading at a third grade level, first half. The weekly spelling lists (see Appendix F) were pretested and posttested as shown in Table 1. Sentence dictation tests (see Appendix G) were conducted at the end of each week. While students often did well on the weekly word lists, the dictation sentences gave evidence of little retention of previously learned words in a controlled vocabulary test (see Table 2). Due to the time factor of 30 minutes daily for language arts instruction, the writer initiated paragraph writing in class weekly and allowed it to be completed during the larger block of time allotted for reading and language experience activities. The unedited paragraphs gave the preponderance of the evidence of the lack of language arts skills (see Appendix I).

The series used school-wide for English was Macmillan. The worksheets asked the students to place a paragraph in order, in time order, or to identify the main idea followed by four detail sentences. They gave evidence of needed paragraph instruction. A sample test was given in Appendix H. More English worksheets showed the need for punctuation. The Zaner-Blozer Handwriting scale gave the students' score in grade level equivalents. The majority of the class was at a third grade handwriting level.

Chapter 1 students often exhibit a lack of self-confidence. This class was given a prewriting survey (Appendix A) that clearly showed a hesitancy in question two, "Would you like to write paragraphs using your spelling words?" with only 53% of the class responding positively (see Appendix C).

Causative Analysis

The problem of the students not acquiring sufficient language arts skills to write a paragraph had several causes. Through the identification process established by the Stanford Achievement Test scores, the Chapter 1 students were those in the lower stanines who may have been slow learners or underachievers who had not been qualified to receive any special education classes.

A number of those students exhibited behavior problems. It is questionable whether the behavior problems started as a result of the lack of understanding in school or the behavior interfered with the assimilation of education. The lack of

motivation to succeed in school could come from a home environment that did not place a high value on education or a home that was not child-centered and showed little interest in the child's successful experience or the lack of it in school. There was no operating parent-teacher organization and only moderate attendance on the one back-to-school night.

The students were from a lower socio-economic background. Being a Chapter 1 school was indicative of the number of students on a free breakfast and lunch program. The federal criteria called for a certain percentage before the school received federal funds. The neighborhood was mostly one-story, single-family homes with a one-parent household. If there were two parents in the home, they were more than likely both working. This made it difficult to get parent involvement when their child was having a problem.

A bilingual and bicultural student population led to problems in language acquisition and the lack of experiential background made it hard for children to express themselves. Although the majority of the Spanish students were bilingual, many of their parents were not and therefore may not have felt capable enough to help their children with any lessons in reading, spelling, or English. Through questioning the students, the writer found that many of them had never been to the beach, to the zoo, or traveled very far from their home.

The Stanford Achievement Test showed low scores in listening comprehension for the Chapter 1 Students. Part of

that problem was the language inadequacies of the student population. Another part was the attention span deficiencies that are characteristic of slow learners or underachievers.

Assimilation of previously taught language arts skills appeared to be lacking in the students. A common complaint of Chapter 1 teachers was heard as, "Didn't they learn anything last year?" There was also a retention problem on a weekly basis as exhibited by math facts or spelling words memorized one week for a test that appeared to be forgotten on a follow-up test the next week.

Acquisition of language could be one of the most important elements in solving the problem of a lack of language arts skills. While drills, lists of words, and facts to be memorized by the students are important educational tools, the use of language arts skills by writing paragraphs using the skills in context was seldom used. Possibly the difficulty of assigning grades to paragraphs would be one reason teachers hesitate to require it. Another reason could be that the quality of the writing was so poor that it was very demanding on a teacher's time to help edit the paragraphs into legibility. It takes time to compose paragraphs and only 30 minutes per day were allowed for writing which included the subjects of composition (English), handwriting, and spelling.

The Related Literature

The writer found Graves and Stuart's (1985) book

particularly helpful in articulating the problems involved in the lack of children's language arts skills in writing. The conceptualized approach of actively participating in the whole activity of writing rather than the drill of component parts is emphasized. These educators advised the use of a word processor to help the students who lack coordination.

Writing is the making of reading according to Graves (1983). Children may decode for ideas differently when they do extensive reading, then they re-read and revise their own texts. If they had never written at all, they would not have experienced putting the component parts of language together (Graves, 1983). With this premise in mind, the writer made a survey of recent relevant literature.

Elizabeth Sulzby (1980) advised that the many claims about the advantages of language experience dictations should be investigated by teachers as to applicability in their respective classroom situations. The teacher functions as a guide during the rereading and editing process. This serves to facilitate reading comprehension.

The study of the drawing, oral language and composing behaviors of selected LEP (Limited English Proficiency) children substantiated the inter-relatedness of the quality and quantity of experiential background on compositions (Bartelo, 1984).

Another study presented the premise to teachers and parents that pre-school children who visually attend to print in their environment acquire beginning reading skills more

quickly. Students who work within a classroom atmosphere conducive to spontaneous writing activities have a greater chance of learning to read having recognized the relationships between oral and written modes of language (Bertrand and Fairchild, 1984).

Additional studies to determine the effectiveness of an integrative approach to language development through reading were done. Comparisons of an experimental and control group indicated that students exposed to language therapy within reading lessons improved scores significantly more than those students receiving traditional, non-integrated reading and language instruction (Doyle, 1982).

The research conducted by Linda Spina and Dorothy Welhoelter (1981) concurs that the ideal classroom is one in which the student feels free to express himself/herself. In this type of classroom students come to understand that reading is their "talk and ideas" written down.

In a study as to how five-year-old children become literate (Kita, 1979), twenty kindergarten children were interviewed and shown four pictures and asked to complete a writing sample. The study suggested the use of print in a meaningful context could provide children with opportunities to express themselves and develop a reason for reading and writing.

Graves and Stuart (1985) found that children best learn punctuation, grammar, and spelling skills in the context of writing. These components taught individually do not

encourage students to draw connections between the components and the whole. Components are best mastered in the context of engaging and meaningful activity such as writing paragraphs and short stories.

Children who underachieve are often deficient in study skills (Green,1986). The child's most efficient learning style should be identified and instruction should be presented in a multimodality way. He suggests building a positive self-image in the child.

The characteristics of the learning disabled child were identified by Gearheart (1977). Some of the same characteristics were exhibited by the children in the Chapter 1 class who were underachievers but they did not qualify for special education programs. The procurement of written language is featured in the various definitions of learning disabilities.

Shinn, Ysseldyke, Deno, and Tindal (1986) developed classroom performance measures of reading, spelling, and written expression at the University of Minnesota Institute for Research on Learning Disabilities. They sampled students' performance in a manner similar to that which occurs in the classroom. The examiners assessed all students individually on a weekly basis for 5 weeks. The testing consisted of 1 minute of reading, followed by 3 minutes of spelling, and then 3 minutes of written expression. Materials were four isolated word lists from basal reading

curricula from preprimer through third grade and the subjects were fifth-grade metropolitan area students who were identified into two groups, learning disabled and low achievers. In scoring, the number of words read correctly were counted, the number of words spelled plus the number of correct letter sequences and the number of words in written expression plus spelled correctly were counted (Shinn, Ysseldyke, Deno, & Tindal, 1986).

A case for a cognitive approach to teaching spelling was presented by Bernice Y. L. Wong (1986). An examination of the cognitive demands of the act of spelling indicates that the speller needs to coordinate several sources of word knowledge: phonological, orthographic, syntactic, and semantic. The act of spelling is completed with a decision about the acceptability of the spelling produced. Wong (1986) states that spelling instruction should include specific information about words.

Performance on a spelling exercise by two groups of students in elementary school was examined by Betty Jane Punnett (1986). Her study was on organizational behavior research that demonstrated specific and difficult goals improve performance in the workplace. One group was asked to do their best and the second group to try for a specific and difficult target. Extensive research strongly suggests that specific and difficult goals improve individual performance more than no goals or "do best" goals (Punnett, 1986).

Benthul, Anderson, Utech, and Biggy (1971) advocated a

linguistic approach to spelling in their text book. Difficulty in spelling arises from the fact that there are about 45 phonemes (speech sounds) in the English language and only 26 letters with which to spell them. Some sounds must be spelled with a combination of letters, some letters spell more than one sound, and most phonemes may be spelled with several different graphemic patterns. For those reasons, Benthul et al. (1971) presented list words grouped according to phonemic and structural elements. The words were also high-utility words that most pupils would use in their daily writing and related by sound-letter patterns. A major goal of their text was to make pupils discover patterns in words with activities that combined auditory discrimination with visual observation (Benthul, Anderson, Utech, & Biggy, 1971).

In conclusion, a review of the literature showed the importance of actively participating in the whole activity of writing rather than emphasizing the drill of a language's component parts. The acquisition of language is enhanced by the rereading and editing process used in composing experiential paragraphs. When students are given an opportunity to express themselves, they develop a reason for reading and writing. The cognitive demands of the act of spelling can be coordinated by drawing connections between the components and the whole through writing paragraphs and reading them in class. Success at this activity can help build a positive self-image in the students, which is one of the ultimate goals of education.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Statement of General Goals

The writer's goal in general was that the student would be able to write a paragraph using improved language arts skills. Ordinarily, fourth grade spelling words would not have been taught to these students because of their low reading scores. It was the writer's intention to challenge the students to reach grade level in spelling which was one to two years above their present achievement.

Behavioral Expectations

The specific objectives stated with the behavior expected at the end of implementation, the standard of performance to be achieved, and the assessment instrument that would measure the behavior for this practicum were chosen as follows:

1. Over a 12 week period, 75% or 12 of the 16 students would improve their spelling as assessed by a weekly posttest from a list of 15 to 21 words and receive a C or higher on the posttest.
2. Over a 12 week period, 63% or 10 of the students would show an increase in the number of words spelled correctly on a weekly sentence dictation test using a controlled vocabulary and receive a

grade of C or higher.

3. Over a 12 week period, 65% or 10 of the 16 students would increase their number of correctly used punctuation marks as assessed by the weekly sentence dictation test with a grade of C or higher on the test.
4. Over a 12 week period, 63% or 10 of the 16 students would increase the number of words used to compose their paragraphs as counted by the writer.
5. Over a 12 week period, 63% or 10 of the 16 students would increase their use of indentation when writing their paragraphs as counted by the writer before editing.
6. Over a 12 week period, 75% or 12 of the 16 students would demonstrate the ability to identify the main idea of a paragraph with a passing score of C or higher on Macmillan English or teacher-made exercises.
7. Over a 12 week period, 75% or 12 of the 16 students would demonstrate the ability to place four detail sentences in proper sequence or time order on Macmillan English or teacher-made practice exercises on a weekly basis with a passing grade of C or higher.
8. Over a 12 week period, 63% or 10 of the 16 students would increase their use of grammatically correct sentences as counted by the writer in their unedited

paragraphs.

Some desired goals not stated as specifics were, that students improve their time on task as observed by the teacher during writing activities, that they would improve their listening skills as observed by the teacher during the paragraph reading time, and their self-images as writers would be enhanced as they listened to their own paragraphs being read to the class as assessed by a pre and post attitude survey.

Evaluation Instruments

The objectives were measured by some of the standard procedures teachers use daily/weekly in the classroom. The spelling curriculum calls for a pretest, posttest, and sentence dictation test on each weekly unit. The weekly word list (see Appendix F) follows a pattern such as long vowel sounds, short vowel sounds, consonant blends, rhyming words, or homonyms and usually consists of 15 to 21 words. The sentence dictation (see Appendix G) builds on vocabulary taught in previous units. This usually has the poorest grades because of the students' apparent lack of retention.

The Macmillan English series has practice exercises in the book and duplicating materials for extra practice. Teachers have also made many assessment items for banks on practice tests for state objectives and the Stanford Achievement Tests on main idea, sequencing, punctuation, (see table 3) and grammar (see Appendix H). All of these types of

exercises including the spelling, took place during the 30 minutes daily assigned to the writing block of time.

Writing paragraphs using a minimum of five words from the spelling list and consisting of at least five sentences was the writer's standard that incorporated all of the objectives within its context (see Appendix I). An increase in the number of words to compose the paragraph, its length, an increase in the use of indentation, and an increase in the number of grammatically correct sentences were counted by the writer.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

The solution that Graves and Stuart (1985) found was to have children write daily. Exercises in spelling books use writing the words in context too infrequently to transpose learning to spell a word list into using the correct spelling in a composition. Writing paragraphs and editing them have a greater impact in learning the total components of written language. They suggested using a word processor for students who lack coordination.

After a two year study Graves and Stuart (1985) found that children who had an assigned time to write in school improved in the correct use of the components and increased their reading scores. In writing, the components consist of letters, words, punctuation marks, and parts of speech.

The writer found these researchers gave her the strongest identification of a solution through writing in context as a key to increasing knowledge and use of correct spelling. While daily writing is ideal it is not practical time-wise in class to expect a paragraph daily since editing and rewriting is necessary. Completing the process of one paragraph a week with self-editing, teacher editing, and rewriting plus time for the teacher to count the number of correctly spelled words was a lengthy one at best.

Gearheart (1977) used as a remedial procedure the writing of simple sentences, paragraphs, and short stories using the child's reading vocabulary. The children dictated the writing to the teacher who used these experience stories as a reading activity. His ideas on language development are featured prominently in the various definitions of learning disabilities. Most approaches to providing assistance to children with learning disabilities are involved with the acquisition and development of language through multisensory programs. Use of the four modalities; visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile (VAKT), are considered part of the major principles for remediation (Gearheart, 1977).

The writer found Gearheart's (1977) approach to language acquisition was one that is incorporated into the Chapter 1 program and called language experience activities. In place of social studies and health, the teacher is to present ideas to the children and record their sentences into short stories that they copy into their notebooks. The class then rereads the stories at the end of each week. It is an ungraded activity. The writer's paragraph writing approach to spelling was ungraded as far as the children are concerned but was counted in the measurement of the activity.

Green (1986) suggested writing and recording as part of the remediation of inefficient study skills. He recommends a multimodality teaching/learning approach for the students who underachieve. Children who are not qualified for special education programs but who fail to succeed in school need to

have their most efficient learning style identified. Some of the ways to help an underachiever are: to learn how to budget time, record assignments, establish priorities, define problems, and establish goals.

Green (1986) found that a child who possesses positive expectations and self-esteem seeks goals that will enhance positive feelings he already has about himself. He listed parenting suggestions to encourage, support, and acknowledge the child. He believes that positive feelings will enhance the underachiever's chance of success in school. The writer felt that reading their own paragraphs to the class also helped to enhance the children's self-images and the activity of rewriting paragraphs would reinforce the use of correct spelling. The children were encouraged to add drawings to their paragraphs if they chose. The writer found this stimulated some of the children to complete the assignment.

Shinn, Ysseldyke, Deno, and Tindal (1986) developed ways to measure reading, spelling, and writing that paralleled actual classroom performance. The examiners sampled students' performance in the classroom for 5 weeks. They tested each student individually for 1 minute of reading, followed by 3 minutes of spelling, and then 3 minutes of written expression. The group they sampled, fifth-grade metropolitan area students who were learning disabled or slow learners, are similar to the writer's Chapter 1 students. The researchers (Shinn, Ysseldyke, Deno, & Tindal, 1986) found their measures sensitive to improvement and growth

under short-term treatment. Writing was their key to successful reading and spelling. The writer incorporated some parts of their assessment techniques but rejected the individual testing as too time consuming when the same testing could be done as a group. Also their word lists came from basal readers which the writer found inappropriate to use as spelling lists.

Bernice Wong's (1986) study used a cognitive approach to teaching spelling. The writer agrees that students need specific structural information about words. Most schools use spelling textbooks that coordinate groups of words having the same structure into units of study. After the children acquire this knowledge, they need to use a self-questioning strategy to ultimately make a decision about the acceptability of the words they spell. The writer agrees with this kind of thinking. If a word doesn't look right it would be best to check on its spelling with a dictionary.

Betty Jane Punnett (1986) used two different groups and two types of goals to study which organizational behavior demonstrated improved performance. One group was asked to do their best, a no goal approach, on some spelling exercises. The other group was given specific and difficult goals for their spelling exercises. She found that the research strongly suggests specific and difficult goals improve individual performance. She also found that ability is a prerequisite to performance, feedback is essential to goal setting, and goals work best when rewarded.

The writer has found that a token reward system is also an excellent behavior modification strategy that helps students become more productive. Something as simple as stickers on papers with passing grades was appreciated by the students. Immediate feedback on the day of spelling tests has been a priority for the writer. Feedback is essential to the paragraph writing in order for the teacher's editing to be effective. Because of the students' lack of language arts skills, their self-editing was not as productive as the teacher's editing. In order for the children to maintain a high level of interest in composing paragraphs, it required a great deal of teacher input.

Sulzby's (1980) solution to the acquisition of language is language experience dictation with the teacher involved in the rereading and editing process. This finding coincides with the writer's belief in paragraph writing and the Chapter 1 approach of language experience activities. The writer's student population is also lacking in English proficiency and experiential background which matches Bartelo's (1984) findings that their inter-relatedness is evidenced in the compositions of children.

Bertrand and Fairchild (1984) found that spontaneous writing activities have the greatest chance of having children recognize the inter-relatedness of oral and written language. The writer used the idea of spontaneous writing to some extent with the only restriction being the paragraph composition must include five of the spelling words on the

list for the week. Since most units of spelling follow a theme, it was easier for the children to get ideas for their compositions.

The writer concurs with Spina and Welhoelter's (1981) findings that children who feel free to express themselves will come to understand that reading is their talk written down. It has been the writer's experience to read to the class whatever the children have written. They often like to use their own names and their classmates' names in their compositions. The only caution the writer has had to make is to make sure the students do not make fun of someone else or say something that would hurt a classmate's feelings. The children usually squirm with delight when hearing their names mentioned in another student's composition. It seems to become a challenge to some students to mention as many of their friends as possible in their compositions. This encourages some to write more than the required paragraph.

Doyle (1982) found that reading and language instruction should be integrated as compared to the traditional way of teaching them as individual subjects. The writer agrees with teaching reading, English, spelling, and writing together in a time block for language arts but curriculum still dictates that the subjects receive separate grades in a traditional manner for the report card.

Kita's (1979) findings on how children become literate give further evidence on writing in context as a solution to the improvement of language arts skills by giving meaning to

reading and writing. The writer found this was basic to the solutions given by others in the search of the literature.

Benthul et al. (1971) gave the writer lists of words that were basic to the pupils needs as well as enrichment words that were topical and thematic. Pupils should be taught that sounds have more than one standard spelling and relate each pattern to many words and not just one. The writer agrees that spelling should not be taught from the reading approach. Reading involves moving from letters to sounds whereas spelling involves moving from sounds to letters. Pupils should listen for a sound and then find the letter or letter combination that spells that sound. Spelling words in the context of paragraph writing gives the pupils an opportunity to use a list of words that will not just simply be forgotten the following week.

Description of Selected Solutions

After reviewing the literature for solutions to improving language arts skills, the writer chose writing weekly paragraphs that would incorporate the components of spelling, punctuation, composition, indentation, main idea followed by at least four detail sentences, and the use of improved grammar. This was done with the writer editing the paragraphs and the students rewriting the paragraphs. The students had a high interest in turning in a required assignment but needed inspiration to do a rewrite. The rewrite and editing was important to the reinforcement of the

correctly used components of a paragraph. Learning spelling words by using them in the context of a paragraph is innovative to the usual activities presented in most spelling book series.

The activities that took place to improve the language arts skills involved in writing a paragraph included the following:

1. The students took a spelling pretest for the weekly unit of study on the first day of the week and took a posttest of the word list on the last day of the week.
2. The students took a sentence dictation test on the last day of the week from the teacher's edition of the spelling book using a controlled vocabulary that incorporated words from previous units.
3. The students did a punctuation exercise weekly after studying a lesson from the Macmillan English Book or teacher-made practice lessons.
4. The students were required to compose a paragraph weekly that used at least five words from the week's spelling word list while using a main idea followed by at least four detail sentences, used indentation and punctuation. After the writer edited the paragraphs the students were required to rewrite it.
5. The students were reminded to use indentation to begin the writing of their paragraphs. The writer

introduced a prize that consisted of a box of "Cracker Jack" for the best paragraph of the week to further motivate the desire to use improved language arts skills as part of an innovative method of using writing in a meaningful context.

6. The students identified the main idea of a paragraph on an exercise weekly after studying a lesson from the Macmillan English Book or teacher-made practice lessons.
7. The students placed four detail sentences in proper sequence or time order on an exercise from the Macmillan English Book or teacher-made practice lessons on a weekly basis.
8. The students wrote weekly paragraphs using self-editing techniques to arrive at as many grammatically correct sentences within the paragraph as possible. The editing by the writer was to count the number of sentences using correct grammar.

The writer felt that these activities were required for the traditional grading of the separate subjects of composition (English), spelling, and handwriting in the language arts block of the report card. They also aided the writer's main objective of writing a paragraph with improved language arts skills.

Learning spelling words in the context of writing a paragraph was paramount to the writer's main goal. Spelling taught in the isolation of word lists does not lead to

retention or transference when writing compositions. It was a real challenge to the writer to be able to decipher the text of a student's composition. The most obvious reason teachers do not use paragraph writing to encourage a meaningful use of spelling words is the time consuming editing process. Ability is a prerequisite to self-editing that is not applicable to the writer's students who are limited in their English proficiency and experiential background. It was a commitment of time on the writer's part to hopefully ensure meeting her goal.

Report of Action Taken

A list of weekly activities was as follows:

1. The writer introduced the spelling word list by first giving a pretest at the beginning of the week and giving a posttest at the end of the week (see Appendix F).
2. The writer called out a sentence dictation test at the end of the week using a controlled vocabulary from the spelling book's teacher's edition (see Appendix G).
3. The writer presented a weekly punctuation lesson from the Macmillan English Book or teacher-made practice exercises (see Appendix H).
4. The writer assigned a paragraph writing time to the students and edited the paragraphs after counting the number of grammatically correct sentences and

checking to see if the students used indentation (see Appendix I).

5. The writer reminded the students weekly to begin their paragraphs with indentation and introduced a prize of a box of "Cracker Jack" for the best paragraph of the week to further motivate the desire to use improved language arts skills. The writer also took a Polaroid picture of the winning student and placed it on the bulletin board (see Appendix E).
6. The writer presented a weekly lesson on identifying a main idea from the Macmillan English Book or teacher-made practice exercises (see Appendix H).
7. The writer presented a weekly lesson on placing four detail sentences in proper sequence or time order from the Macmillan English Book or teacher-made exercises as recorded on Table 6.
8. The writer counted the number of grammatically correct sentences in the students' weekly paragraphs before editing them as recorded in Table 7.

The regular part of the curriculum was incorporated into the paragraph writing so no administrative permission was necessary for the practicum to take place. The Macmillan English Book and its accompanying practice exercises are a regular part of the school curriculum so no permission was needed to use them. The teacher-made exercises were in banks of materials available to the writer.

Besides the commitment of time on the writer's part, a great deal of cooperation was needed from the remaining fourth grade teachers and administration. The time slot committed to spelling was very fragile since it was before and after the lunch period and was taken away often without a moment's notice. Pupils were also pulled out for special activities which left discrepancies in the number of pupils being tested as shown in the Tables. It would be a problem if administrative philosophy leaned towards teaching a spelling level that equated with the reading level, but it was the writer's belief that the challenge of fourth grade words would motivate the students. Also, less paperwork is high on the agenda of stress factors that need to be addressed in the teaching profession. Needless to say, the implementation of this practicum generated a great deal more paper work than is usually required in order to meet minimum spelling objectives.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results

The fourth grade spelling words would not ordinarily have been taught to these students. It was the writer's general goal that the students, who were reading at a second and third grade level, spell at a higher level. Objective One was measured by the weekly spelling test. Over a 12 week period, 12 of the 16 (75%) students improved their spelling performance and received a C or higher on the posttest.

The grades A to C were chosen as those that represent passing grades on a report card. Of the four students that scored less than 63%, one had repeated third grade and scored too low to enter a learning disabilities class. Incredibly enough his mother did not want the writer to drop the criteria for passing from the 21 words to the first 14 words which consisted of a basic list. The second list of seven enrichment words was more difficult but she insisted he attempt them with her help. Since the students had the lists in a text book, she also studied with him on the weekends for the pretest. The other students then developed such competitiveness as to the number they would get right on a Monday morning pretest that the pretest scores soon became meaningless in measuring a true increase in a week's period.

Table 1 summarizes the results of all the tests for each student.

Table 1. Spelling Tests Results

Student	Test Grades A to C	Total Tests	Percent of Tests A to C
1	10	10	100
2	12	12	100
3	12	12	100
4	12	12	100
5	7	12	58
6	10	10	100
7	7	11	64
8	9	11	82
9	5	12	42
10	4	10	40
11	9	12	75
12	11	12	92
13	10	12	83
14	6	11	55
15	10	10	100
16	8	9	89

One other student that scored low tested into a special education class later. Another student who had severe home problems left the school at the end of the implementation and returned a month later. The fourth low scoring student would be considered a behavior problem. He simply refused to do

anything at times and needed constant home contact and a reward system for even the smallest accomplishments. The basic list of 14 words would have been sufficient to meet spelling objectives but none of the children would accept a drop in criteria. Peer pressure was very much in evidence. The students did not want to appear different from their counterparts. The writer found this to be true in the literature on underachievers.

Although these Chapter 1 students did not have quite the same amount of stigma attached to them as did those students who attended special education classes, some still felt embarrassed by being placed in this class. One student said she felt sick on the first day of school, the second day she was absent, and on the third day she burst out crying so hard that the writer had to hold her and comfort her. When asked what was wrong, she responded that she didn't want to be in a Chapter 1 class. She had been in a Chapter 1 class the year before. Parents did have the option of requesting that their child be removed from a Chapter 1 class.

Objective Two was measured by the weekly sentence dictation test. Over a 12 week period, 63% or 10 of the 16 students showed an increase in the number of words spelled correctly and received a C or higher on the test. This met the goal which exceeded the writer's expectation since past experience has shown this to be an especially difficult task for low achieving students. The students' scores are recorded on Table 2.

Table 2. Words Spelled Correctly on Sentence Dictation Tests

Student	Test Grades A to C	Total Tests	Percentage of Tests A to C
1	10	10	100
2	12	12	100
3	12	12	100
4	8	11	73
5	7	6	64
6	10	11	91
7	3	11	27
8	4	11	36
9	1	12	8
10	4	9	44
11	9	12	75
12	12	12	100
13	11	11	100
14	0	10	0
15	8	8	100
16	3	7	43

The sentence dictation tests are a controlled vocabulary and only present words that have been introduced in previous units. It was gratifying to see that six students passed 100% of their tests when it came to the spelling grade, but that number dropped by half when it was time to grade the same test for punctuation.

A pattern of low scores can be seen developing in the

tables for the students who had the more severe, undetermined learning problems. The test takes more time to give with repeating the sentence at least five times. If a student missed that particular time slot when it was given, it became next to impossible to make it up since the writer had no aide or other adult that could supervise. The writer asked two of the better students to read the sentences to those who missed the test, but it did not work. Their timing and phrasing were not sufficient to hold the attention of the students being tested and the situation deteriorated from poor behavior.

Objective Three was measured by the weekly sentence dictation test. Over a 12 week period, 56% or 9 of the 16 students showed an increase in the number of correctly used punctuation marks and received a grade of C or higher on the test. This did not meet the expected goal of 63% or 10 of 16 students, but it did come very close. One student scored consistently high in every area except this one. On many occasions the writer handed back the students' paragraphs because they did not have any end punctuation marks.

Punctuation is also taught in isolation for the English component of objectives and the scores were much higher. The writer chose this test to score punctuation because it is used in the context of writing as opposed to a simple multiple choice style of picking out the correct piece of punctuation. Table 3 shows a wide range of scores from 100% to two scores of 0% with this test resulting in the most low scores of all the measures used.

Table 3. Punctuation Used Correctly on Sentence Dictation

Student	Tests Grades A to C	Total Tests	Percent of Tests A to C
1	1	12	8
2	11	12	92
3	12	12	100
4	5	11	45
5	1	11	9
6	10	11	91
7	6	11	55
8	9	11	82
9	0	12	0
10	6	9	67
11	12	12	100
12	12	12	100
13	8	11	73
14	0	10	0
15	6	8	75
16	1	7	14

It appears punctuation is a very difficult skill to master not only at the fourth grade level but also throughout elementary school. Too much emphasis on it as a grade would be very discouraging to the average student when the teacher's main objective is to elicit compositions. The writer did not give this score to her students.

Objective Four was measured by the writer's count of

words used to compose the students' paragraphs comparing the first six weeks to the last six weeks. Over a 12 week period, 69% or 11 of the 16 students showed an increase in the number of words used in their compositions. This exceeded the goal of 63% or 10 of 16 students, by one student. (see Table 4).

* Figures Rounded

Table 4. Average Number of Words Used to Compose a Paragraph:
First six weeks Compared to Last Six Weeks

Student	Ave. No. 1st Half	Ave. No. 2nd Half	No. Increased	No. Decreased
1	39	51	12	-
2	109	86	-	10
3	79	81	2	-
4	60	53	-	-
5	54	56	2	-
6	34	44	10	-
7	41	60	19	-
8	71	53	-	18
9	47	67	20	-
10	68	61	-	7
11	39	44	5	-
12	86	128	42	-
13	60	76	16	-
14	72	73	1	-
15	110	90	-	20
16	52	85	33	-

The writer actually had to discourage two of the students from writing so much. With their enthusiasm of having their paragraphs read to the class and winning the contest for the best "Cracker Jack" paragraph of the week, they were writing pages instead of a paragraph. An adult's average number of words in a paragraph is approximately 100 words, whereas these students were trying to claim close to two hundred words as a paragraph. It became too cumbersome for the writer to keep up with when it came to editing their long stories. They still maintained their enthusiasm but cooperated by cutting down on the length of their papers. One other student decided length was good and jumped her average number of words per paragraph by 42 words during the second half. She had also won a small award as the most creative writer in the class when the writer had to identify a member of the class for a grade level contest.

Objective Five was measured by the writer's count of the number of times students used indentation when writing their paragraphs. Over a 12 week period, 44% or 7 of the 16 students used indentation when writing their compositions. This did not meet the goal of 63% or 10 of 16 students.

It appears that some children just do not consider that a very important part of their task although three of the students always used this skill. Reminders in general must be given to start paragraph writing with indentation, but some students need specific directions such as "Put your finger here," to physically identify that space. The tactile senses

could best be incorporated in this instance. Table 5 shows that two of the students never used indentation even though they were reminded at least once each week.

Table 5. Indentation Used in Writing Paragraphs

Student	No. Indentations	No. Paragraphs	Percent Used
1	5	11	45
2	8	11	73
3	11	11	100
4	10	12	83
5	7	11	64
6	7	12	58
7	5	5	100
8	1	1	10
9	6	10	60
10	9	11	90
11	2	12	18
12	12	12	100
13	5	12	42
14	2	7	29
15	0	11	0
16	0	11	0

Objective Six was measured by Macmillan English or teacher-made practice exercises. Over a 12 week period, 100% or 16 of the 16 students demonstrated the ability to identify the main idea of a paragraph with a passing score of C or

higher on the exercises. This by far exceeded the goal of 75% or 12 of 16 students. Table 6 shows the high scores in this area.

Table 6. Main Idea of Paragraph Plus Four Detail Sentences

Student	No. Main Idea	No. Detail Sent.	No. Paragraphs	Percent Identified
1	11	11	11	100
2	11	11	11	100
3	11	11	11	100
4	11	11	12	92
5	11	11	11	100
6	12	12	12	100
7	5	5	5	100
8	10	10	10	100
9	8	8	10	80
10	10	10	10	100
11	11	11	11	100
12	12	12	12	100
13	12	12	12	100
14	7	7	7	100
15	11	11	11	100
16	10	10	11	100

Even though this objective was measured with grade level exercises it appears it may have been easier to achieve than expected. There is also the possibility that the students became more aware of identifying a main idea after having to

choose one to write a paragraph. All of the students enjoy success and this was an area of achievement for them. The writer used token rewards such as candy, gum, pencils, or stickers for grades A to C. Each student had a place on the bulletin boards for his or her best papers in spelling and in math. It was an effective attempt to raise the students' self-esteem. Their peers could also see they carried home fourth grade level books.

Objective Seven was measured by Macmillan English or teacher-made exercises. Over a 12 week period, 100% or 16 of the 16 students demonstrated the ability to place four detail sentences in proper sequence or time order with a passing grade of C or higher. Table 6 summarizes this objective along with Objective Six since both were tested at the same time as exhibited in the sample in Appendix H. The goal of 75% or 12 of 16 students, was again far exceeded.

Objective Eight was measured by the writer's count of grammatically correct sentences in the students' unedited paragraphs. Over a 12 week period, 69% or 11 of the 16 students used 63% or higher grammatically correct sentences in their unedited paragraphs.

The writer encouraged the students to read their paragraphs over to themselves. She also asked them to edit their writing as best as they could before turning it in. Their attempts at self-editing were almost futile as shown in the sample in Appendix I. Table 7 gives the evidence for reaching above the goal of 63% or 10 of 16 students.

Table 7. Percent of Grammatically Correct Sentences in Unedited Paragraphs

Student	No. Correct Sent.	No. Sentences	Percent of Sentences
1	34	45	76
2	59	82	72
3	90	102	88
4	40	59	68
5	42	72	58
6	57	65	88
7	25	27	93
8	29	47	62
9	38	64	59
10	49	63	78
11	20	44	45
12	129	155	83
13	59	89	66
14	40	46	87
15	50	76	66
16	30	80	38

This also gives evidence as seen in the students' writing surveys in Appendices A, B, C, and D, that a positive attitude towards writing was developed. All of the students participated in this activity eagerly. Table 8 only identifies six of the students as having increased their level of grammatically correct sentences in the second half

of the practicum, but that growth in a class of basic skills students is still encouraging.

Table 8. Percent of Grammatically Correct Sentences in Unedited Paragraphs: First Six Weeks compared to Last Six Weeks

Student	% Correct 1st Half	% Correct 2nd Half	Percent Increased	Percent Decreased
1	67	82	15	-
2	56	90	34	-
3	89	88	-	1
4	60	79	19	-
5	61	54	-	7
6	94	82	-	12
7	95	86	-	9
8	47	88	41	-
9	65	55	-	10
10	67	77	0	0
11	77	48	6	-
12	42	73	-	23
13	82	55	-	27
14	93	76	-	17
15	68	64	-	4
16	40	36	-	4

In conclusion, the general goals to improve spelling and language arts skills of Chapter 1 fourth grade students through paragraph compositions were deemed a success. The students also enjoyed the activity which improved their self-

confidence as indicated on their postwriting surveys. The token rewards of a box of "Cracker Jack" and a Polaroid picture on the bulletin board were insufficient for the high number of quality paragraphs that were turned in each week. The writer acknowledged at least three runners-up besides the one winner and gave them packs of gum and notices to their parents of their accomplishments. Even parents stopped by to see who were the week's winners.

Conclusions

The importance of having met the first objective, improved spelling performance, is that it was met on a fourth grade level. The grade C is the equivalent of 75% to 84% for the county's average passing level. The grade D is passing but needs improvement with the equivalent of 65% to 74% for the county's guidelines. The only concession the writer made to her students was to consider passing the material presented at a 63% level since the students were being taught spelling and language arts at one to two years above their reading levels. This was in keeping with Betty Jane Punnett's (1986) research that specific and difficult goals improve individual performance more than no goals or "do best" goals. It is the writer's contention that low achievers, such as her Chapter 1 class, are not challenged enough.

Wong (1986) and Benthul et al. (1971) presented a case for a cognitive and linguistic approach to spelling. The

writer concurred by teaching list words that were grouped according to phonemic and structural elements. It is unfortunate, in the writer's opinion, that students are often presented lists of reading words that are found on state assessment testing as their spelling words. This does not allow the students to recognize patterns in spelling that are combined with sounds, such as a list for the long sound of E for example, which would increase their auditory discrimination with visual observation.

The usual spelling activities presented for a week's study of a word list consist of a pretest, writing the misspelled words 5 or 10 times each, using the words in a sentence for each, placing them in alphabetical order, a trial test, a final test, and using activities in a spelling book if you have one. Giving a sentence dictation test and looking words up in a dictionary plus any of the aforementioned activities, except the final test, could be considered optional parts of a spelling program. The writer incorporated all of the activities except the dictionary and spelling book exercises. The students met the second objective. They increased the number of words spelled correctly on a sentence dictation test and received a grade of C or higher. Language experience dictations (Sulzby, 1980) are a successful part of the Chapter 1 program and it was the writer's intent to see if the teacher's structured sentence dictation could also be as successful, and it was.

The student's prewriting and postwriting surveys

compared question number seven in Appendix E. It reflected the students' overconfidence in the area of punctuation. They did not meet the third objective, to increase the use of correct punctuation marks, or the fifth objective, to use indentation, but they were not deterred from composing paragraphs for their lack of knowledge in this area. Green (1986) suggested building a positive self-image in the child and it was especially important to the writer that the students would not become discouraged over one component of composition so she withheld the scores for poor punctuation and indentation from them. They scored better on isolated punctuation exams in the English program. It was the writer's concern that the skill did not carry over into the use of spontaneous writing.

Graves and Stuart (1985) also expressed this concern that the whole activity of writing rather than the drill of component parts is emphasized. Writing paragraphs is not a part of the usual spelling activities due to the extensive consumption of a teachers's time in editing especially for a basic skills class. Bertrand and Fairchild (1984) premised that a classroom conducive to spontaneous writing activities would have a greater chance to recognize the relationship between reading and the written modes of language. Doyle (1982) advocated an integrated reading and language instruction approach which improved scores significantly as it did for the writer's class in spelling. The students felt free to express themselves in their paragraphs which most of

them did quite openly. One student told of his part in saving a friend's life by warning the parents his 9-year-old friend was using drugs. Spina and Welhoelter (1981) conducted research that concurs with freedom of expression's importance to written language.

For these and many other reasons the writer used a goal of increasing the number of words used to compose a paragraph over a 12 week period which the students met in the fourth objective. The only problem was two students were so prolific they had to be limited to the length of the stories they were writing. The expectation was that reluctant writers would be encouraged to attempt longer paragraphs after hearing their stories read to the class. This did happen as evidenced in Table 4.

The sixth and seventh objectives, identifying the main idea and placing four detail sentences in order, were tested for English grades as separate components. A main idea and at least four detail sentences were also the requirement for the paragraph writing. The students did that much or their paragraphs were handed back until they met that minimum requirement. The scores for counting a main idea and four detail sentences in paragraphs would therefore have turned out to be 100%. As it was, the scores turned out to be 100% anyway on testing those components in English class. This far exceeded the writer's expectations since one of the characteristics of the learning disabled child (Gearheart, 1977) is the lack in procurement of written language. The

Chapter 1 students exhibit this same deficiency in language acquisition.

Shin et al. (1986) gave the writer a sample way to measure the eighth objective, to count a passing 63% of grammatically correct sentences in their unedited paragraphs. The students exceeded this goal. The writer can only surmise that the activity of writing paragraphs helped the students reach that level of proficiency. A comparison of the first half of the implementation compared to the second half, Table 8, shows that five of the students actually increased their level of grammatically correct sentences and one maintained her level. One of the reasons the other students showed a decrease in their levels is they began to write more sentences which allowed more room for errors to occur. That was not a bad trade-off for the increased length in their compositions.

In conclusion, this practicum project showed that paragraph composition does improve spelling and language arts skills. The students enjoyed the activity and improved their scores and their attitude towards writing. The writer was pleased with the attention they gave while their paragraphs were read to the class. It was one of the highlights of the school week that was looked forward to by both the students and the teacher. Since acquisition of written language is paramount to their academic success, the writer hopes the students will continue to keep their enthusiasm for writing paragraph compositions.

Recommendations

The writer has seven specific recommendations based on her observation of the implementation of this practicum. First, the intermediate elementary teacher could use paragraph writing that incorporates a minimum of five spelling words as an ungraded weekly activity. It generates enthusiasm whether it is edited and rewritten or not. Second, the teacher may find students will improve their language arts skills without adding to the teacher's burden of paperwork. Third, since classroom time is often limited and interrupted, paragraph writing could be assigned as a spelling homework activity. This could involve the parents as editors with the understanding that the ideas and words would be coming from the students. Fourth, the activity should take place early in the week in order to enhance spelling the words correctly. Fifth, the spelling list should come from a phonemic and structured spelling program so the students will begin to recognize patterns in sounds and spelling.

For the sixth recommendation, guidelines need to be addressed as to writing about their classmates. The teacher needs to be aware that the students love to include their classmates' names in their stories. The students should get permission from their classmates when they want to write about them. A rule needs to be firmly established by the teacher that nothing hurtful or embarrassing can be written

into the story concerning anyone. Finally, the teacher will need to use his or her judgment whether the students are capable enough to read their own compositions. The writer's basic skills class had a difficult time standing up in front of the class to read while trying to decipher their own writing. In order to save time and enhance the enjoyment of having their paragraphs read, the writer would read the stories to the class. The students were quick enough to let the writer know if she misinterpreted any part of their story.

It is the writer's opinion that intermediate elementary teachers should encourage writing paragraphs or short stories as a regular part of their spelling and language arts program. The teacher's reward is in the delight the students will exhibit when it is time to hear their paragraphs. "A wise teacher makes learning a joy;..." (The Living Bible, Proverbs 15:2, 1971, P, 511).

Dissemination

The results of this practicum were shared in the following ways. The writer conducted this practicum in a self-contained classroom, but shared the results with her four other fourth grade level teachers. The writer was also on the faculty's spelling committee and shared her enthusiasm for this paragraph writing activity with her administrators and the rest of the faculty at a meeting. Finally, the writer placed a copy of this report in the media center.

APPENDIX A

STUDENT'S PREWRITING SURVEY

APPENDIX B
STUDENT'S POSTWRITING SURVEY

Name: _____ Date: _____

Students Postwriting Survey

Directions: Read the question and circle your answer.

1. Did you like to write paragraphs using your spelling words?

Yes No
2. Do you feel writing paragraphs using your spelling words has helped you learn your spelling?

Yes No
3. Do you still need someone to help you write your paragraphs?

Yes No
4. Do you feel you have become a better speller?

Yes No
5. Do you still need someone to help you with punctuation?

Yes No
6. Can you write a paragraph using at least five sentences?

Yes No
7. Do you feel you can read and write well?

Yes No

APPENDIX C

RESULTS OF STUDENTS' PREWRITING SURVEYS

* Figures Rounded

1. Did you ever write paragraphs using your spelling words?

Yes 33% No 67%

2. Would you like to write paragraphs using your spelling words?

Yes 53% No 47%

3. Do you need someone to help you write your paragraphs?

Yes 33% No 67%

4. Do you feel you are a good speller?

Yes 67% No 33%

5. Do you need help with punctuation?

Yes 13% No 87%

6. Can you write a paragraph using at least five sentences?

Yes 73% No 27%

7. Do you feel you can read and write well?

Yes 80% No 20%

APPENDIX D
RESULTS OF STUDENTS' POSTWRITING SURVEYS

* Figures Rounded

1. Did you like to write paragraphs using your spelling words?
Yes 100% No 0%
2. Do you feel writing paragraphs using your spelling words has helped you learn your spelling?
Yes 93% No 7%
3. Do you still need someone to help you write your paragraphs?
Yes 7% No 93%
4. Do you feel you have become a better speller?
Yes 100% No 0%
5. Do you still need someone to help you with punctuation?
Yes 20% No 80%
6. Can you write a paragraph using at least five sentences?
Yes 100% No 0%
7. Do you feel you can read and write well?
Yes 100% No 0%

APPENDIX E
COMPARISON OF PREWRITING
AND POSTWRITING SURVEYS

Comparison of Prewriting and Postwriting Surveys

Question	Prewriting		Postwriting		Positive Gain
	Yes	No	Yes	No	
1.	33%	67%	100%	0%	67%
2.	53%	47%	93%	7%	40%
3.	33%	67%	7%	93%	26%
4.	67%	33%	100%	0%	33%
5.	13%	87%	20%	80%	7%
6.	73%	27%	100%	0%	27%
7.	80%	20%	100%	0%	20%

APPENDIX F
LISTS OF SPELLING WORDS

	List 1.	List 2.	List 3.
1.	add	comet	being
2.	bunt	desk	drank
3.	bus	drum	drink
4.	dull	dwelt	gather
5.	fumble	frog	hang
6.	inning	glimmer	path
7.	jogging	hundred	rather
8.	map	list	shop
9.	mitt	misty	shot
10.	odd	plant	sink
11.	pan	reflect	smother
12.	pen	scrap	Thanksgiving
13.	pennant	slip	thick
14.	pin	spot	thicket
15.	pond	speck	thimble
16.	rid	stamp	thistle
18.	tent	steps	throb
19.	till	strip	thumb
20.	tumbles	twins	together
21.	wind	vast	wither

	List 4.	List 5.	List 6.
1.	among	added	afraid
2.	breakfast	bricks	aim
3.	country	checking	anyway
4.	dread	gathered	boy
5.	front	hundreds	break
6.	head	inches	eight
7.	heavy	packed	great
8.	hollow	packing	haste
9.	month	planting	hibernate
10.	nothing	ranches	mate
11.	ready	smelled	migrate
12.	son	stitches	pail
13.	spread	tons	pale
14.	swamp	touched	maybe
15.	threat	twisted	raise
16.	touch		reins
17.	waddle		sail
18.	wander		steak
19.	wobble		stray
20.	won		trail
21.	young		wait

	List 7.	List 8.	List 9.
1.	beehive	boast	aid
2.	blind	bronco	cave
3.	child	burro	fail
4.	dragonfly	coal	find
5.	dry	coax	flow
6.	fight	fold	great
7.	firefly	follow	goal
8.	flight	hello	gold
9.	fly	hero	may
10.	fry	hold	peas
11.	housefly	lasso	sight
12.	I'll	oak	slide
13.	I've	oats	sly
14.	kind	only	stove
15.	might	open	thief
16.	mind	pillow	
17.	slight	post	
18.	spider	roan	
19.	termites	rodeo	
20.	tonight	throw	
21.	wild	window	

	List 10.	List 11.	List 12.
1.	anteater	alarm	age
2.	color	antarctic	badge
3.	doctor	arctic	bandage
4.	December	art	change
5.	equator	care	grant
6.	equator	care	grant
7.	forget	card	huge
8.	gorilla	darkness	jam
9.	interesting	fare	jelly
10.	ivory	February	juggle
11.	lizard	harm	jungle
12.	mirror	January	large
13.	November	marble	lodge
14.	number	March	magic
15.	October	park	orange
16.	paper	scare	page
17.	polar	share	rangers
18.	rhinoceros	shark	regions
19.	remember	sharp	ridge
20.	September	smart	strange
21.	yesterday	startle	trudge

The word lists are taken from Benthul, Anderson, Utech,
& Biggy (1971).

APPENDIX G

SENTENCE DICTATION TESTS
FOR SPELLING AND PUNCTUATION

List 1 Sentence Dictation Test for Spelling and Punctuation

1. Lay the map on the table till I get a pin.
2. Bring the baby pen and I will carry the pan for her food.
3. We are rid of the wind, but the tent is down.
4. Add a game to play on the dull bus ride.
5. He had an odd look on his face when his mitt fell into the pond.

List 12 Sentence Dictation Test for Spelling and Punctuation

1. The jungle is a strange, magic place.
2. Try as you might, you cannot change your age.
3. The book is huge, but a page is missing.
4. Jam and jelly are good spreads for bread.
5. The giant in the story was as gentle as could be.
6. She learned to juggle three large, orange balls.

The sentence dictation tests are taken from Benthul, Anderson, Utech, & Biggy (1971).

APPENDIX H

MAIN IDEA FOLLOWED BY FOUR
DETAIL SENTENCES IN ORDER TEST

Directions: Decide which sentence is the main idea sentence. Then decide the correct order for the detail sentences. Write the paragraph on the lines below. Remember to indent the first word.

1. Next you poke two small holes in the middle.
2. Finally you hang up the plate.
3. First you find a metal pie plate.
4. You can make a bird feeder.
5. Then you put a long piece of string through the holes.

APPENDIX I
PARAGRAPH SAMPLES

Student #3's Paragraph, List 3

Before editing:

It was Thanksgiving I wanted my faimly to gather together. We being to shop for food I bought a thick turkey. and a thin chicken and 4 drinks. We hanged up stuff. we smother patato with gravie. then I said I rather to call I did and then they came and we had the best Thanksgiving.

The End

After editing:

It was Thanksgiving. I wanted my family to gather together. We went to shop for food. I bought a thick turkey, a thin chicken, and four drinks. We hung up stuff. We smothered potatoes with gravy. Then I said I'd rather call my friends. I did and then they came. We had the best Thanksgiving.

The End

Student #3's Paragraph, List 11

Before editing:

One day at school the alarm came on and we were in art. we were starting to make cards for your mom. then we played will marbles then the lights came out you would see darkness I was scared so the light came on I was startle so we went to are class and talked about Antarctic and Arctic we learned a lot about the North and Southpole then we talked about January and feburary and March and then we did a picture of a shark and the It was time to go home. so I went home and I went to the park. so we played a the park and then I wont home and went to sleep and I said that was a fare day.

After editing:

One day at school the alarm went off and we were in art. We were starting to make cards for our mom. Then we played with marbles. Then the lights went out. You could see darkness. I was scared then the lights came on. I was startled. We went to our class and talked about the Antarctic and the Arctic. We learned a lot about the North Pole and the South Pole. Then we drew a picture of a shark. Then it was time to go home. I went home and I went to the park. We played at the park and then I went home and went to sleep. I said that was a fair day.